

1 Brazilian/Canadian Literatures: a Cultural Legacy

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Resumo: Neste ensaio analiso os romances *Ciranda de Pedra*, de Lygia F. Telles e *Fall on your Knees*, da escritora canadense, Ann-Marie MacDonald, em diálogo com os romances *Wuthering Heights* e *Jane Eyre*, das irmãs Emily e Charlotte Brontë, respectivamente.

Observa-se nessas narrativas, a presença do legado europeu e, também, como esses romances, através do processo de transculturação, são capazes de se desviar desse legado, trazendo novidades e diferenças, ao mesmo tempo em que estabelecem um diálogo rico e esclarecedor entre elas.

Palavras-chave: literatura brasileira, literatura inglesa, literatura canadense, transgressão, Mal, identidade, abjeção

In “Postcolonial Theory, Difference, and National Traditions: the Case for a Brazilian-Canadian Dialogue”, Neil Besner comments on the idea that the colony seems always to misperceive its own cultural productions as having come after an original, and therefore a better iteration. For the Canadian theorist, such a view is “a corrosive element in the postcolonial condition, and one that runs counter to a more nuanced understanding of the emancipatory and liberating possibilities in postcolonial theory and practice” (2005, 25).

A very important perspective in Besner’s article, which I myself share, is the recognition that the legacies of both Canada’s and Brazil’s colonial pasts constitute narratives “that can be heard as speaking to each other, and as recognizing resonances in each other, in useful and revealing ways” (ibid., 25). As it is impossible for Canada and Brazil to rid their bodies politic of the foreign traces in their respective cultures, it is better to seek for a move “that could engage both cultures in a resonant dialogue” (ibid., 26). To conclude, Besner highlights the value of asymmetrical colonial experience and the postcolonial response to this experience, in that such responses will reveal aspects of both cultures, to themselves and to each other, in new and useful lights.

From the perspectives outlined above, I shall analyse the novel by the Brazilian author Lygia Fagundes Telles, *Ciranda de Pedra*¹, (1954), and *Fall on Your Knees*, by a Canadian writer, Ann-Marie MacDonald, in a dialogue with the novels of the Brontë sisters, Emily and Charlotte, *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* (both 1847), respectively.

My approach goes beyond the context of nations and, instead, concentrates on current debates on the question of evil, transgression and abjection, taken as inseparable corollaries of the passions and inevitably leading to exclusion. According to Georges Bataille, in *Literature and Evil*, the role of literature, of imagination, and of dream is to penetrate the abyss of Evil. Hence he compares vice — the significant expression of Evil — with the anguish of the purest love. However, to understand the whole process of absences and exclusions, as generated by Evil, it is necessary to remember Western rationality and its definition of the subject. The enlightenment's view decrees what society or the individual "must be", transforming into absolute truth the cultural values of a world whose duration is not certain. Consequently, rationalism becomes a self-destructive system, as what cannot be assimilated becomes, consequently, taboo.

It is within this perspective of absences and exclusions that Telles, MacDonald, and the Brontës all weave their narratives, highlighting the issue of evil according to an understanding that can be related to Michel Maffesoli's speculation. Maffesoli, in consonance with the work of Bataille, proposes that the destructive part, the part of excess or ebullience, is exactly what anticipates a new harmony (2004, 18). Hence the necessity to construct a more fertile rationality, open to ambivalences and, consequently, capable of thinking in this polysemous way. Thus to understand the plots developed in the novels under discussion, which are also representations of different periods of time though similar in their insertion of the gothic spirit (which I shall treat later), it is necessary to shift perspectives, no longer criticizing or explaining, but understanding and accepting. Maffesoli's formulation of the idea that it is through accepting evil, in its different modulations, that we can reach a certain bliss in living, is extremely important to the study of the gothic and of these novels.

¹ I believe that *Circle of Stone* would be a good translation for the title. All quotations from this novel are translated by me.

Before returning to this discussion under the theoretical premises briefly outlined above, it is necessary to situate the novels in their convergences and divergences. I shall open with *Ciranda de Pedra* and *Wuthering Heights*, and later bring *Fall on Your Knees* and *Jane Eyre* (the latter just briefly) to join in the dialogue.

Hybrid Narratives

Both *Ciranda de Pedra* and *Wuthering Heights* present two plots². The first one, in both works, involves the first generation and is markedly gothic, as it presents secrets, madness, passions, death and evil; the second plot, in its turn, involves the second generation, in a redefined space, where gender relations are more egalitarian and in which women are no longer the victims of patriarchal authority. It is important to highlight, nevertheless, that in *Ciranda de Pedra* we observe the hypocrisy of domestic bourgeoisie in a context of egotism, frustrated desires and disputes which fail to meet the transgression of the first generation plot. However, it is important to note that the gothic element is actually appropriated in the second plot, in both novels, as a means of constructing psychological depth and intensity. This fact can be observed both by the uncanny repetitions of names (*Wuthering Heights*), and by the reproduction of physical characteristics that produce a doubling (*Ciranda de Pedra*). These related elements serve to prevent any sort of severe narrative division. Thus, in both narratives the plots are intertwined, particularly if we consider that some characteristics are present in both, signalling the impossibility of a clear division. The need to explore this division is simply an analytical recourse determined by a certain peculiarity in *Ciranda de Pedra*, where an intense phase starts after the death of Laura and Daniel. This new phase is also present in *Wuthering Heights*, but not with the same intensity as in Telles's novel.

² The first plot in *Ciranda de Pedra* is not as delineated as it is in *Wuthering Heights*. The narrative that involves the past is loaded with gaps, for it is woven in Laura's voice, in her madness, or by the voices of the elder daughters, fraught with moral judgment.

This fact can be explained by the object of focalization in each narrative: Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff in the first, and Virginia in the second.

In both novels, the authors appropriate elements of the literary gothic to represent and investigate women's fears within a restrictive and sometimes threatening domestic frame. For Catherine and Laura, being a woman involves only a choice of different kinds of imprisonment. In the case of Emily Brontë's heroine, after a childhood of relative freedom, roaming with Edgar Linton — which marks her metamorphosis from a wild girl into a young lady — she initiates a process of confinement that will only end in death. In *Ciranda de Pedra*, Laura renounces a life of apparent stability, though limited and oppressive, next to her husband, to live a great passion with Daniel. However, social and family repressions are so great that she ends up her days confined in a room, mad, but under the care of her lover till her death. When Catherine marries Edgar Linton and moves to Thrushcross Grange, her transformation is not complete, as she cannot leave her shadow, Heathcliff, behind and, thus, she remains torn between the two men. As we can see, the gothic treatment in both novels shows the imprisonment of Catherine and Laura in confined spaces: the house, the room, and, finally, the shattered prison of the body, from which they long to escape but they cannot, for the "beetle that falls on its back can never stand up" (Telles, 1998, 32).

Another point of convergence between the two novels refers to the desire for dissolution of the boundaries of the self. Catherine Earnshaw's famous "Nelly, I am Heathcliff" is a declaration of her own life, while for Heathcliff she is his soul. When they are dislocated from this world of imaginary unity, therefore, they struggle desperately to recover it. When Catherine is compelled to choose between the two men in her life, she loses the other self that gives her the sense of wholeness. Her only hope lies in death and a spiritual reunion: "They may bury me twelve feet deep, and throw the church down over me, but I won't rest till you are with me" (1995, 218), she tells Heathcliff. We see that the only boundary between them now is the one that constitutes desire that is dissolved only through death, which marks the end of the separation.

Still in the same line of thought, there are Laura and Daniel. Contrary to Catherine, Laura makes her choice and leaves her husband to live with Daniel, her heart's desire, at the expense of exclusion and madness. Daniel, in his turn, reflects on Laura's condition and on death, asserting that within the body there is a kind of breath that is set free with death, "[...] piercing every sphere, completely free" (Telles, 1998, 56). He then contrasts the heat of the breath with the heat of an iron that cools down when switched off, while Laura would have forever warm hands, sparkling eyes, and breath (ibid., 56).

An important aspect observed by Bataille about Heathcliff is that, if we imagine him outside the story, bereft of the charm of the story, his character would seem artificial and contrived (2001, 20). Heathcliff's revolt against the rational and civilized world is such that he does not hesitate to break all laws, committing himself in his revolt, to the side of Evil. Catherine, on the other hand, is absolutely moral, and it is for that morality that she dies, not being able to detach herself from the man she loved when she was a child. Although she knows that Evil is deep within him, she loves him to the point of seeing herself in him. Evil, therefore, according to Bataille, is not only the dream of the wicked: it is to some extent the dream of Good. Thus death is the punishment sought and accepted for this mad dream, but nothing can prevent the dream from having been dreamt. It was dreamt by creators and their creatures alike.

In both novels we observe the breaking of the law and the complicity of the authors with the transgressors. In *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine dies for breaking the law of fidelity, not in flesh but in the spirit. In *Ciranda de Pedra*, Laura dies for failing to respect the sacred patterns imposed on women by the bourgeois family and matrimonial law.

In both novels the thematic of good and evil is presented in constant tension to harmonize in the end. In *Ciranda de Pedra*, however, the legacy of transgression renders harmony impossible for the second generation, which can be observed by the "daughter of sin", Virginia, as we will see. In the next section, I will bring *Fall on Your Knees* into this dialogue.

Transgression and Abjection in *Ciranda de Pedra* and *Fall on Your Knees*

The age of reason developed philosophical, scientific and psychological systems to define and classify the nature of the external world, the parameters of human organization and their relation to the workings of the mind. It is not surprising that in this context, transgression becomes important not only as an interrogation of received rules and values, but also to identify, reconstitute or transform limits. In this respect, gothic fiction is less an unrestrained celebration of unsanctioned excesses and more an examination of the limits produced in the 18th century to distinguish good from evil, reason from passion, virtue from vice and self from other. Thus gothic texts open to a play of ambivalence, a dynamic of limit and transgression that both restores and contests boundaries. However, it is exactly this play of terms, of opposition that characterizes the ambivalence of gothic fiction, as good depends on evil, light on dark, reason on irrationality, in order to define limits. At the same time this play shows that gothic narratives are paradoxically an inscription of both sides of the coin. These relations remain crucial to the gothic dynamic of limit and transgression (see Botting, 1999, *passim*, 1-20).

In the novels by Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Telles and MacDonald, the theme of the passions transgresses the boundaries of reality, challenging reason. If on the one hand adultery, in *Ciranda de Pedra*, brings drastic consequences to Laura's life, and later, to the life of her own daughter, Virginia, on the other, we cannot help seeing this betrayal as a celebration of transgression, or as evil. Laura's blurred memories, the narratives of the past full of secrets, celebrate the lover's union, the deviances, the red roses, the black dress, the fire, the dance, constituting such an intense celebration of desire that it obscures definitions of reason and morality. However, as in all gothic fiction, transgression in these novels is ambivalent. As Botting reminds us, the terrors and horrors of transgression in gothic fiction become a means to reiterate the values of society: virtue, merit, propriety. This strategy functions as a warning of the dangers of social and moral transgression; hence its relation to evil shadows in a threatening manner.

While adultery and its consequences will be at the core of the novel by the Brazilian writer, in *Fall on Your Knees* it is father-daughter relationships that will be at play.

MacDonald's novel is the story of two families united by a multiracial marriage: the Scottish Pipers and the Lebanese Mahmouds. The family tree, given to Lily (the only female survivor of the Piper family) by her cousin, the Afro-Canadian Anthony, represents and delineates the multicultural and racial identities of a Canadian family. At the same time the tree signals to the need to search for roots, digging up buried and repressed secrets in the lives of the women of the Piper family. However, in order to have this done it will be necessary to revisit the past, which refuses to be buried, as in all gothic fiction.

As Lily tells Anthony the story of his mother (here the narrator Lily passes on the narration to an omniscient one), the reader partakes in the difficult process of reaching the truth, which is always deferred, due to the intricate and contradictory narratives told from different points of view. As in *Ciranda de Pedra*, here there is also the problem of illegitimacy. For a long while the reader is made to believe that Kathleen, Mercedes, Frances and Lily are daughters of James and Materia. However, this knowledge of the true origin of Lily is deferred to the very end.

We can observe that in gothic contextualization, the familiar, with reference to a domestic situation, has always been problematized, hence its defamiliarization, since Anne Radcliffe, in the 18th century. In MacDonald's novel, the gothic revises those strategies of defamiliarization that magnify the home. The gothic genre, therefore, contrary to other forms of literary expression, is structured through family norms. MacDonald associates the conflicts that arise from the family plots "with the dark enclosed spaces where these conflicts are experienced" (Williams, 1995, 23). Thus, the author creates a narrative that operates within the norms that rule the patriarchal family and, at the same time, threatens its fall, giving readers the possibility to contemplate the evil side of their culture and of their very selves. Hence we may conclude that gothic fictions open space to the confrontation and exploration, and simultaneously to the denial of a theme that gives birth to the romantic and

modern sensibility, according to which “the law of the Father” is tyrannical and we dwell in his ruins (ibid., 24).

Let's return now to the Piper women. Kathleen, the elder sister, dreams of becoming an opera singer in New York, as she sees in the profession the possibility of independence, fame and freedom. But it is in New York that she meets Rose Lacroix, a black musician, with whom Kathleen lives a transgressive love relationship for which she will be terribly punished.

However, it is Frances who, by exhibiting the mother's legacy (the one she had to give up in the name of the husband), challenges the father, playing, dancing, and performing as a sex worker at her uncle's “house of ill fame”, performing the part of the woman caught in a typical male locus only to twist it the other way round. It can be observed, thus, that music in the novel goes back to the medieval ritual in southern Italy, where some women, according to popular beliefs, when they were bitten by the tarantula, would find relief in songs and different melodies. As they hear musical harmonies, their souls delight, and, since happiness is an excellent remedy for afflictions, they pull themselves together and come back to life. This is a pleasure that emanates from the interior to the exterior (Clément, 1996, 20). It is the pleasure of the music and the dance that takes them into a frantic flight of freedom, as it also enacts a form of resistance against the tyranny of the father.

In *Ciranda de Pedra*, however, Laura's disease is seen by everybody as a “punishment of God” (Telles, 1998, 14). The condition of the mother makes Virginia, the younger daughter, rebel against everyone, and this attitude corroborates her excluded position, mainly when it is found out that she is not the daughter of Natércio, Laura's husband, but of Daniel, her lover. In order to bear the space of exclusion, Virginia creates a world of lies where the imagination opens up possibilities for a more endurable life. The reader can also understand Virginia's narrative as an uncanny opposition of good and evil, virtue and vice, which in the end are versions of the same thing and still threaten to destroy the heroine caught between them. Therefore, she must find a third way out.

There is a dialogic relationship between these two novels and the novels of the Brontë sisters. The epigraph in the Canadian novel is taken from the famous

dialogue between Catherine and her father, in *Wuthering Heights*: “Why canst thou not always be a good lass, Cathy?” “Why cannot you always be a good man, father?”. But if we recall the little Jane Eyre, in Gateshead Hall, treated by her cousins as “bad”, a “mad cat”, “liar”, and “rat”, we can also see Jane as the prototype for Frances, the sexually molested child, and a teenage “slut” (as seen by her father). But as Howells observes, there are also differences in the novels. Both have haunted houses and attics that harbour scandalous secrets “but there is no madwoman, only women trapped in silence” (Howells, 2003, 112). MacDonald breaks with Brontë’s narrative in the sense that she is not preoccupied with romantic love; instead, she displays an array of “peripheral sexualities”, such as lesbianism and incest that lead, in the end, to illegitimacy. On the other hand, Frances here and Laura in *Ciranda de Pedra*, as well as their predecessors, Jane Eyre and Catherine Earnshaw, break with traditional barriers of the female world and dare to expose that which had always been kept hidden from women. It is through this female gaze at the world that the gothic form is structured.

In both novels, past secrets are revealed in connection with the present. Both houses, which are both in a sense simulacra of *Wuthering Heights* and *Thornfield Hall*, are metaphors of the dominant architecture of domestic horror; they are, as Howells suggests, “multipurpose spaces” of protection, of imprisonment and pain (Howells, 2003, 113). In the same line of thought, Anne Williams refers to the “female gothic” as a narrative of disclosure and reparation, in other words, as the fiction of “psychoanalysis”: “Like that of the Freudian analysand, the heroine’s hysterical misery may be alleviated by exploring the dark corridors, opening the closed doors, lifting the black veil. She experiences the weight of the past as a reality that may be escaped only when its secrets are brought to light through the process of discovering connections between past and present, herself and others” (Williams, 1995, 171). It is inevitable that the crucial secret is the sexual one. Thus, in gothic fiction, the home is always the mysterious space that hides violent sexual secrets.

Now, let’s go back to *Ciranda de Pedra*. It was difficult for Virginia to understand the judgment her sister made of her mother as the woman who “abandoned the husband, daughters, to live with another man. She forgot her duties,

stained the honor of the family, fell into deadly sin” (Telles, 1998, 37). Virginia tries to justify the mother’s attitude saying that she “was ill, not knowing what she was doing” (ibid., 39); or to save the mother she blames Daniel, the devil. All these facts made Virginia feel guilty, and this feeling was reinforced by the manner in which Natércio looked at her, as if deep inside her soul was hidden the devil that destroyed his life.

Thus, both Laura and Daniel as well as Virginia were figures that had to be shut off from the family circle: the first ones for having broken the sacred marital rules, and Virginia for being the daughter of an adulterous relationship, conceived from “evil”.

It is important to highlight that for “evil” we understand the somber side of our nature, which, according to Maffesoli, although it can be domesticated by culture, continues to enliven our desires, our fears, and our feelings. Maffesoli suggests that we should accept the challenge of this view, even if only methodologically — and perhaps epistemologically — for it emphasizes the paradox, and also the caricature, that lead to a conception of form as capable of voicing what is experienced, the conflict itself (Maffesoli, 2002, 28).

While in traditional gothic the figure of the father was always linked to tyranny and violence, in the revised view of MacDonald, James Piper is both a dedicated and an incestuous father. He cannot restrain his sexual desire for girls. After seducing his wife Materia when she was only 13 years old, he rapes his favourite daughter, Kathleen, when he comes to see her in New York and finds out that she and Rose Lacroix were lovers. Later after Kathleen’s funeral he abuses Frances sexually.

Kathleen, as a result of an incestuous relation, becomes pregnant, and this pregnancy results in her own death as she gives birth to the twins, Ambrose and Lily (the only one to survive).

The two novels in question show that what is forbidden is essentially in the domain of the human and made for the human being. According to Bataille, the forbidden domain is the tragic domain or, better still, the sacred domain. However, as it is banished by society, this domain is magnified; yet the ban, paradoxically, “beautifies that to which it prevents access” (Bataille, 2001, 22). In the same line of

thought, Michel Foucault contends that the transformation of sex into discourse was an attempt to expel from reality the forms of sexuality that were not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction. In other words, pleasure and desire had to succumb in the name of procreation. Through the various discourses, sexual irregularities (such as Laura's, Kathleen's and Virginia's) were annexed to mental illness or deviations. Thus, all this garrulous attention over sexuality is motivated in order to perpetuate a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative. What we can see, however, is that in recent centuries, there has been a multiplication of sexualities.

As Foucault observes, up to the end of the 18th century there had been created a chain of explicit codes to govern the sexual practices of the married couple, classifying them into licit and illicit. Thus, breaking the rules of marriage or seeking strange pleasures brought an equal measure of condemnation, and peripheral sexualities (the adulterous, the homosexual) were under constant surveillance. However, the success of this process does not lie in the exclusion of those sexualities: on the contrary, society succeeded only in giving rise to a wide outbreak of perversion and a long pathology of the sexual instinct. At issue, rather, is the type of power this process brought to bear on the body and on sex. Power did not exclude sexuality, but included it in the body as a mode of specification of individuals, by means of spirals in which pleasure and power reinforced one another (cf. Foucault, 1998, *passim*, 36-47).

The writers under discussion here share this view as they highlight the subjective experience of their female protagonists. Their complexities and their incomplete images are characterized by excesses, as well as by the desires to escape the ideological yokes that imprison them. Hence they work gothic motifs to expose the transgressive desires, the conflict, that which has to stay on the outside, that cannot be named, that has to be buried alive, unlike the Western tradition that has worked to obliterate the obscure part of the human.

Both *Ciranda de Pedras* and *Fall on Your Knees* escape the traditional system in which the signifier is always linked to the signified; on the contrary, we

have just to observe the way Natércio looks at Virginia to unveil her origin, attributing to her a sinful origin. So the reader starts to suspect the protagonist's paternity.

Let's now return to Lily's origin. Through the various stories about the dead brother, Frances grants Lily her own history, reaffirming her identity. From fragments of memory, Frances realizes that Kathleen is Lily's mother, but the identity of the father she creates in her own imagination. Thus, in search for hidden secrets, Frances decides that Leo Taylor, the black man who used to take Kathleen to school, must be Lily's father. But, as the omniscient narrator reminds us, "[...] memory plays tricks. Memory is another word for story, and nothing is more unreliable" (MacDonald, 1996, 255).

Relying on her imagination, Frances decides to pursue Leo Taylor, and gets pregnant by him. Howells sees every single situation Frances experiences as signalling her conflicting subjectivity — the loss of the dark-skinned mother, the repressed hatred of the abusive father. The relation between Frances and Leo and the conception of Anthony suggests the return of the repressed in a transgressive act of recuperation which passes by the boundaries of the codes of race and sex, determining a mediation between past and present, between the dead and the living (Howells, 2003, 119). Later, when pregnant, Frances hears James' confession, revealing him as Lily's father.

We must not forget Mercedes. This frustrated sister, incapable of controlling her somber side, plans to have Frances's baby sent to an orphanage, making everyone believe, including Frances herself, that the baby was born dead. Not only is Frances denied the right of motherhood, therefore, but Anthony is also denied the mother's care. Still in the narrative sequence, James dies reading Dante's *Paradise*. Then, Frances reveals to Lily the name of her mother, giving her also Kathleen's diary. At the same time Frances provides Lily with the means to escape from Cape Breton and go to New York to meet Rose Lacroix, her mother's lover.

However, in order to stimulate a response to the reader's curiosity, we notice that both Telles and MacDonald make use of a technique which is recurrent in gothic fiction, namely, the deferral of the truth. With reference to this issue Michel

Foucault, in a seminal essay, “Language to Infinity”, provides an analysis of this process of deferral in eighteenth century novels of terror. In these novels, he argues:

It is necessary to approach always closer to the moment when language will reveal its absolute power, by giving birth, through each of its feeble words, to terror; but this is the moment in which language inevitably becomes impotent, when its breath is cut short [...]. Language must push back to infinity this limit it bears with itself, and which indicates, at once, its kingdom and its limit (Foucault, 2000, 98).

It is important to notice that every process of deferral of the truth signals the difficulty of acknowledging and accepting any relation that transgresses the borders of conventional sexuality.

When later Virginia finds out the truth about her paternity, her father had already committed suicide (similarly to Lily, Virginia loses both father and mother before she comes to know the truth), denying her the opportunity of recognition. At that time, Virginia lived with her sisters at Natércio’s, who she thought was her real father. In that house she felt totally excluded; she wasn’t part of the circle that consisted of her sisters Otávia and Bruna, and of the neighbours Conrado (her love from childhood), Leticia (his sister), and Afonso (who will later marry Bruna). She wasn’t included in their games, having to hear: “Virginia didn’t take after anybody” (Telles, 1998, 63), a comment that maliciously signals her origin.

After the revelation and death of her father, whom she now sees tenderly, Virginia decides to go to a Nun’s boarding school, which plays the role of the convent in traditional gothic fiction. There she is considered by the nuns to be dissimulated, “with eyes that have seen terrible things” (Telles, 1998, 197). We notice that during all that time Virginia has occupied a space of abjection, just like her mother, as well as Kathleen in *Fall on Your Knees*.

Contrary to the object (that which opposes the subject), the abject is excluded from the realm of meaning, for it cannot be named. Yet, from its place of banishment, the abject is always challenging the subject, refusing to be expelled. Consequently, it is a threat: it provokes the return of the repressed, of that which, though familiar, must be kept at the edge, for it does not respect ideology. Thus, the

abject is on the other side of the border, does not respect positions, rules; on the contrary, it draws attention to the fragility of the law. On the other hand, abjection is linked to desire. This process, however, is unconscious, so much so that it is rejected by the subject. This paradox marks its association with the literary gothic. So, if on the one hand the abject is rejected, on the other, it is violently and painfully desired. And as in *jouissance*, the object of desire “bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other” (Kristeva, 1982, 9). Abjection is above all ambiguity. If on the one hand it releases a hold, on the other it does not allow the other to be free from what threatens it. On the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger: hence, pleasure and repulsion.

When Virginia leaves the convent, she goes through that process of attraction and repulsion in relation to those people she had left behind. The return, however, is marked by the ghosts of the past. We notice that the abject is not identified only with a past repression, but with what constitutes the subject, his/her desires, which, although repressed by laws, social norms, and structures of meanings, are there to be sued for. According to Kristeva, “I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and instead of what will be ‘me’. Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be” (Kristeva, 1982, 10).

In *Ciranda de Pedra*, Virginia loses her mother when she is only a child, in deplorable circumstances. However, when she returns to the “father’s” home, she tries to revisit all losses, the exclusions, in order to be part of the circle, as a means of revenge. To accomplish this objective, she let the two forces overflow -- good and evil -- that constitute her very being. Freeing herself from the yokes, Virginia goes from hand to hand till she closes the circle. Thus, she entertains a homoerotic relationship with Leticia; then, to hurt Bruna, she seduces and despises her brother in law, Afonso. In respect to Otávia, though she considered her alienated and selfish, she was also jealous of her, as she thought Conrado liked her. She knew she would not hurt one without hurting the other. They all made her remember the past she repudiated, the circle where they were all “solitary and yet betrayed each other” (Telles, 1998, 149). She compared the many lovers of her sisters with the true love of

Laura, who, unlike her sisters, for having the courage to reveal its name, was excluded; after all, she transgressed “the law of the sacred duties as she held to that love” (ibid., 148). She admired the love of her parents: “the beauty of that love that made him pretend to be mad so as to penetrate in the world of the diseased. And in it dive into death” (ibid., 149).

However, Virginia feels she does not belong in that house, in that world; she feels like Daniel, an intruder. She wishes she were dead, thinks of suicide, to join the circle of the dead, since in the circle of the living, where she had desired so much to belong, she had been rejected. Now that she was finally accepted, it was too late, she could no longer fit in.

The problem for Virginia was less the difficult relation with her sisters and more the memories and the feeling of guilt towards the mother. She feels she had abandoned her as she had preferred the comfort of Natércio’s home. She blames herself for having come to Natércio’s and tormented him with the living image of adultery. She feels terrible, for her plans to ruin everyone had turned against herself. So, after telling Leticia her story, Virginia starts to see the five members of the circle from a different perspective, more humanized, and with the certainty that she knew nothing about them, about their lives and pains: “The semigods were only five human creatures” (Telles, 1998, 185). She finally acknowledges that it is necessary to learn to deal with one’s own shadows.

In the end, instead of choosing death as a means of freedom, Virginia opts to live, to reconstruct a fragmented identity, distancing herself from the traditional gothic narrative. Without fears, having recovered the past, Virginia goes away, which is *per se* an act of transgression.

Going back to *Fall on Your Knees*, we must conclude that it is a history of women moved by ambition, talent and desires, but that they end up disappointed, imprisoned and dead. However, MacDonald finds in the gothic world a means to recover those identities subordinated to social determinism. Those abjected female bodies turn the screw the other way round, as shown by Materia, running away from home to marry out from her social condition; Kathleen, freeing herself from the law of the father; and Frances, prostituting herself to run away from the father and propitiate

Lily's freedom, but also in order to live out the transgressive desires that can make life tragic but so much fun (MacDonald, 1996, 233).

Last Words

As we can see in the narratives above analysed, it can be said that women challenge patriarchal authority along generations, as well as transgress prescriptive norms of sexuality. It is important to emphasize that it is through abjection, as represented in literary works, that social and moral values can be questioned. At the same time, the abjected body retains the power to revolt and transgress.

It is important to conclude, taking into account Bataille's notion of Evil, the reading of those novels with his thought that though the being is not doomed to Evil, he/she must try to avoid becoming enclosed within the limitations of reason.

Finally, reinforcing Neil Besner's position, as seen in the first section of this essay, that as it is difficult for Canada and Brazil to rid their bodies politic of the foreign traces, it is better to seek for a move that could engage both cultures in a resonant dialogue. Thus, considering the Brazilian and Canadian narratives here analysed, one can observe how the European legacies resonate in them, and how all these novels are able, through a process of transculturalism, to deviate from these legacies, adding novelty and difference, as they establish, at the same time, an enriching and enlightened dialogue between themselves.

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